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PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

Working Group on the equitable geographical representation of Member States in the Secretariat

Report of the Vice-Chairman of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly at its forty-seventh session

1. By resolution 47/226 of 30 April 1993 the General Assembly decided to establish an open-ended Working Group of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly and requested its Chairman to convene a meeting of the Working Group for one week in 1993 at Headquarters to consider the formula for the determination of equitable geographical representation of Member States in the Secretariat, on the basis of Article 101, paragraph 3, of the Charter of the United Nations, as set out in Assembly resolution 41/206 C of 11 December 1986 and further outlined in Assembly resolutions 42/220 A of 21 December 1987, 45/239 A of 21 December 1990, 46/232 of 2 March 1992 and other relevant resolutions.

2. The Assembly also requested the Chairman of the Fifth Committee to report thereon to the Assembly at its forty-eighth session, as an exceptional measure and without prejudice to the full implementation of General Assembly resolution 46/220 of 20 December 1991.

3. The Working Group held five meetings between 19 and 23 July 1993 at Headquarters, New York, under the chairmanship of the Vice-Chairman of the Fifth Committee, who, in the absence of the Committee's Chairman, was charged with carrying out this task on his behalf. To assist it in its discussions, the Group had before it a working paper prepared by the Secretariat.

4. This working paper contained information on the system of geographical distribution followed by two organizations in the United Nations system. The World Health Organization (WHO) uses the formula established by the United Nations adapted to the requirements of its own membership and number of geographical posts. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has no

indicative quota or any other system of geographical distribution. The reason for this is the relatively small number of Professional posts in relation to the number of member States of WMO. However, the principle of equitable geographical distribution is kept in mind in appointing staff members and every effort is made by WMO to achieve the most equitable representation of its membership possible.

5. The following issues were raised by delegations during the debates:

(a) The number of posts subject to geographical distribution was questioned in the sense that an effort should be made to identify other posts that could be included in the base figure;

(b) Information was sought on such types of personnel as short-term employees (i.e. staff recruited for less than one year), civilian personnel assigned to missions, contractual personnel and others. At the same time, it was emphasized that the difference between permanent and temporary posts should be borne in mind;

(c) Different opinions were voiced about the usefulness of continuing to exclude from geographical distribution posts in other United Nations organs (i.e. the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)), mission posts, posts in the General Service and related categories and others;

(d) The validity of the Charter, particularly Article 101.3, as a guiding principle for the composition of the staff was reaffirmed. It was pointed out in that context that the system of desirable ranges was only one of the methods that could be used to apply the principles of the Charter;

(e) It was proposed that the system of desirable ranges should be abandoned altogether or at least temporarily suspended. It was pointed out, on the other hand, that if the ranges were eliminated there would be no way to measure the representation of Member States in the Secretariat;

(f) The opinion was also voiced that the system of ranges should be maintained but applied with more flexibility;

(g) It was felt that it was not the system of ranges but rather the relationship among the three factors, membership, contribution and population, and their relative weight that should be reviewed. During the discussions on that particular aspect of the question, delegations tended to espouse one of three positions favouring a greater weight being given, respectively, to each of the above-mentioned factors;

(h) It was suggested that more emphasis should be placed on the weighted ranges for the representation of Member States, for it was not only the number of nationals of a given State in the Secretariat that counted, but also their rank and position;

(i) It was felt that the present discontent with the system of ranges could be allayed through the introduction of an upward flexibility different from the downward flexibility. In practical terms, the downward flexibility

could remain at 15 per cent while the upward flexibility could be set at a higher rate, such as 25 per cent. This would alleviate the problems created by the overrepresentation of some Member States;

(j) Great interest was also expressed in the methods used by other international organizations to gauge the geographical representation of their membership.

6. The Working Group found itself unable to agree on specific conclusions and recommendations.